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Inside APHIS

Lotus Notes E-Mail
Linking APHIS Employees To Achieve Our Vision

When APHIS employees joined forces to create a vision for the agency's future, everyone agreed that, to remain a leader in USDA, especially in the times of downsizing and budget tightening, collaboration in program delivery throughout the agency is essential. But before the workforce can create a unified approach among all our employees, they must be able to communicate with each other, something they can't effectively do with the agency's current technology. But, by the end of fiscal year (FY) 1998 though, they will be able to by using *Lotus Notes,* an electronic mail (e-mail) program that will link all agency employees together worldwide.

During the outset of vision planning for the agency, employees identified what is now known as "One APHIS," a concept for fostering program initiatives that share resources, consolidate support services, and standardize systems and processes. Surfacing as part of this visioning process was the need to improve internal communications by linking all APHIS employees together through their computers with standardized e-mail, implemented with a One-APHIS approach. This need for improved internal communications remains a top issue for employees and was voiced by them as recently as February 1997, at an all-employee listening session. Prompted by Administrator Terry Medley and his concern for valuing employees and the issues affecting them in the workplace, the APHIS Management Team (AMT) took the first step in scoping out a long-term solution for improving internal communications. And in a March 13, 1997, meeting, the AMT voted unanimously to endorse the selection and accelerated implementation of common e-mail software for all of APHIS.

"Setting an e-mail standard, nationally and internationally is crucial in building cooperation among employees across program lines," said Medley. "Implementing the standard universally will bring us a giant step closer to a functional reality of our vision."
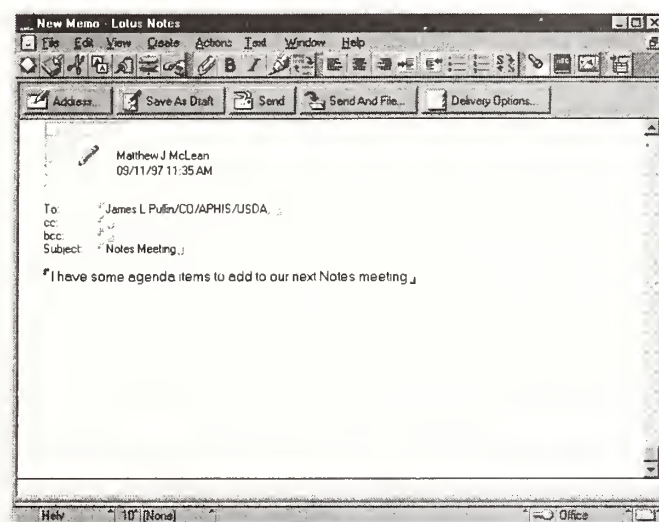
The impact of this decision will extend greatly beyond the technology goal of APHIS' Science and Technology change element. In fact, using a standard e-mail package will enable the agency to improve its ability to achieve **all** the vision change elements by giving employees fluid and seamless communication. To ensure a One-APHIS approach with program and support staff leadership involvement, the AMT empowered the *APHIS Integrated Planning (AIP) team,*

a technical planning group with APHIS-wide program and support staff representation, to lead the implementation along with *the Information Technology community (ITc),* whose members are supervised by the Information Technology Coordination Staff (ITCS).

Lotus Notes Emerges as the E-mail Solution

To determine the best electronic communications system for the agency, the ITc called upon IBM Government Systems, the *Integrated Systems Acquisition Project (ISAP) contract* vendor, for recommendations. (The ISAP contract, as you recall, is APHIS' contract established for purchasing computer systems and hardware.) IBM has a multiyear renewable contract, which was initiated in 1995, supporting more than 6,000 users at 1,200 sites worldwide. This mandatory procurement contract provides everything

A Lotus Notes e-mail window as it will look in Windows 95.

from basic local office automation to advanced agencywide applications.

IBM's recommendation to the ITc was for APHIS to implement Lotus Notes as the new e-mail standard. To confirm this recommendation, ITc conducted what's called in the IT arena a *beta test*. Nearly 140 employees (34 of whom were remote users) across various line and support programs nationwide became beta testers. As part of the testing, ITc members attended training on how to run and manage Notes as a system, and beta testers attended training on how to use the software itself. The beta test evaluation also included information on installation and user support by the ITc. The findings were based on the experience of the ITc members who participated and a survey of the beta testers using the new e-mail program over a 6- to 7-week trial.

The testing showed that in order to achieve connectivity and use Notes effectively, APHIS would need to implement a standard *desktop* solution as well. In other words, all employees will need to have computer equipment and programs with compatible operating systems and office automation software to connect and run them. The ITc then developed a *standard computing platform* for the entire agency. The new platform, which includes Windows 95, faster processors, and memory upgrades, fulfills these requirements. (See box at right.)

"A standard electronic mail system will also require basic minimums for all computer hardware and software if we are to effectively implement Notes," said Mike Gregoire, Chief Information Officer for APHIS. A standard configuration for software has been developed. The ITc will work with the individual staffs to ensure equipment meets their needs and will run the software.

Employees in the ITc also support a common platform to simplify their customer support activities. "It's been hard to try to cover the whole arena from the field to Riverdale when you have many different needs and software among our customers," said Bobbi Bork, with ITc in the Human Resources Division at headquarters. "Having a standard e-mail system on a unified platform will help us provide much better service."

Historically, multiple platforms and applications have always challenged the ITc customer service employees. Now, moving in one direction instead of many will enable these employees to focus on, thoroughly learn, and support one standard set of computer programs.

APHIS employees currently use several e-mail packages, including *GroupWise 4.1*, *FTS2000Mail*, and *Applixmail*. GroupWise 4.1, which employs *graphical user interface (GUI–pronounced "gooey")* technology, has trouble handling hundreds of employees at once. FTS2000Mail is character-based, meaning you view it as text only with no windows or graphics. Plant Protection and Quarantine's (PPQ's) Northeastern Region uses Applixmail on workstations hooked up to *servers*, which are specialized computers running the *Unix* operating system. Applixmail is also GUI-based but works best, because of transfer methods, with text-only messages to recipients outside the Unix operating system. The differences between *personal computers (PC's)* running on the Windows operating system via a *local area network (LAN)* and Unix-platformed workstations make it hard for any one e-mail software program to operate well across platforms. Lotus Notes has the capability to communicate seamlessly between platforms.

But, before worrying about if they can send or receive e-mail, employees must be able to access the mail system. Many employees in Animal Care (AC), Investigative and Enforcement Service (IES), and other program and support areas need to access APHIS systems remotely. A top priority of the AMT, AIP, and ITc implementation teams is to ensure that these employees have the equipment and programs necessary to access

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Standard Computing Platform

These are the software standards for each employee in APHIS.

Windows 95 (operating system)

Lotus Notes (electronic mail)

Lotus SmartSuite, includes:

- Wordpro (word processing)
- 1-2-3 (spreadsheet)
- Freelance (graphics)
- Approach (data base)
- Organizer (scheduler)

Network Access Suite

IBM AntiVirus (cleans floppy and hard disks of viruses)

Netscape 4.01 (browser—allows you to view sites on the Internet)

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e-mail from field offices, home-based computers, and other equipment setups, as well as the office LAN's.

Once employees get online, or gain access to the system, it needs to respond in a reasonable amount of time. During the beta testing of remote packages, downloading 100 e-mail messages using Notes took 3–4 minutes; using GroupWise, it took 13–18 minutes. This significant difference in time leads to much higher costs for GroupWise users, especially those using long-distance lines for connectivity.

In addition to providing e-mail for agency connectivity, the Notes software package also provides a personal calendar, a multiperson scheduling system, and other options. The e-mail program includes an editor for a widely used text format, so-called rich text files. Notes also gives users choices among various fonts, colors, formats, and file viewers for popular desktop applications. These viewers make it possible for you to read or print data without needing the whole program supporting it on your desktop. Notes also handles many different kinds of attachments, such as graphics and text, data, or executable program files. Users on PC and Unix networks can easily send, receive, and read Notes mail sent between them. Even attachments present no problems.

Employees participating in the beta test said the ease of attaching files and spending less time and/or expense to connect remotely were advantages of Notes over other e-mail packages they used previously. They also said they received good, prompt support from the Notes Engineering Team members.

Some employees surveyed as part of the test commented that the connection to the system and mail delivery were too slow. The implementation teams and the AIP are addressing these issues, and some will be resolved with the installation of the standard computing platform.

Notes Meets Year 2000 Requirements

Many older computers and programs that APHIS uses only allow two digits for the year section of a date. And when we reach the year 2000, computers will interpret this to be the year 1900. This can cause costly and potentially dangerous miscalculations. One example would be that a computer might calculate that none of us have been born yet!

The information technology industry has set year 2000 standards for software and hardware. The Notes package meets these standards by allowing four digits to be saved with any data that indicate a year. By being year 2000 compliant, Notes will need only an upgrade and not a replacement when a worldwide year 2000 solution is developed. In addition to these industry standards, Congress and the Office of Management and Budget made other requirements for Federal agencies. One is that agencies inventory all legacy (existing) hardware, software, and systems for year 2000 compliance. As we install our new e-mail package and accompanying systems agencywide, the ITc will have the opportunity to begin the inventory of APHIS systems.

Getting Standard E-mail "On the Street" in APHIS

In August 1997, using their experience and the beta test evaluation report, about 50 members of the ITc and the AIP met in Fort Collins, CO, to chart the physical implementation phase of the implementation of universal e-mail nationwide. "I specifically want to include in the planning and implementation of Notes the senior computer specialists from every regional office; folks from

Riverdale, Minneapolis, and Fort Collins from all the functional areas; as well as the training team," Mike Gregoire directed in a July memo to the ITc.

Assigning the right people to the job is also an approach emphasized under the APHIS change agenda. The agenda item Shared Leadership Through Teamwork calls for teams to be formed for specific tasks and, whenever possible, to cross unit lines and be interdisciplinary. "Not only are we implementing this across the agency, but we are doing it together as an agency," said Tracy Bowman, ITCS, one of two project managers for the implementation. The many participants who teamed up from the ITc and AIP team represented the full range of APHIS' programs, the Office of the Administrator, staffs, and diverse geographic locations.

Securing buy-in across all of these staffs and locations is mandatory because the new e-mail package will not just go to one particular program or staff, or just to employees at Riverdale. It's going to all programs and support staffs everywhere, including State offices, regional offices, ports, overseas offices, and employees working out of their homes. Not only will the connectivity provided by a standard e-mail move the agency closer to One APHIS, but so will the approach to implementation taken by the ITc and AIP.

"It's not a race to see which program can complete the project first," said Chuck Campbell, ITCS, the other implementation project manager. "The goal is for the **entire agency** to be running the same e-mail package by the end of FY 98." By that time, everyone in APHIS will be using Notes to send and receive e-mail. (One acknowledged exception is Wildlife Services [WS] due to their existing Management Information System plan, which calls for e-mail implementation over a longer period of time.)

Installation Teams and Sites

Northeastern

- Regional Offices:
  Albany
  Annapolis
- New York
- Massachusetts (including CT, ME, NH, RI, and VT)
- Illinois
- Michigan
- Maryland (including DE)
- Pennsylvania
- Virginia
- Ohio (including WV)
- New Jersey
- Wisconsin
- Indiana
- Minnesota

Southeastern

- Regional Offices:
  Tampa
  Gulfport
  Nashville
- Florida
- Georgia
- North Carolina
- Puerto Rico
- South Carolina
- Tennessee
- Kentucky
- Alabama
- Mississippi

Central

- Regional Offices:
  Brownsville
  Arlington, TX
  Fort Worth
- Kansas
- Nebraska
- Oklahoma
- Texas
- North Dakota
- South Dakota
- Iowa
- Arkansas
- Missouri
- Louisiana

Western

- Regional Offices:
  Englewood, CO
  Lakewood, CO
  Sacramento
- New Mexico
- Arizona
- Hawaii
- Idaho
- California
- Washington (including AK and Guam)
- Colorado
- Montana
- Nevada
- Utah
- Wyoming
- Oregon

International Services

- Mexico City
- Santiago, Chile
- Brussels, Belgium
- Guatemala
- Tokyo
- Beijing
- Seoul
- Canberra, Australia

National

- Animal Care and IES Laptops
- ITc members involved in implementation
- AMT, AIP, IT Customer Council
- FSO/HRO
- Washington, DC
- Riverdale
- Frederick, MD

Unix (existing)

- Baltimore
- Annapolis
- Richmond and Dulles, VA
- Harrisburg, PA
- Dover, DE
- Madison, WI
- Minneapolis, MN
- Avoca, NY
- Albany, NY
- Robbinsville, NJ
- Elizabeth, NJ
- John F. Kennedy International Airport, NY
- Moorestown, NJ

Unix (new)

- Chicago
- Norfolk, VA
- Detroit, MI
- Wilmington, DE
- Brooklyn, NY
- Boston, MA
- Philadelphia, PA

Notes:
- Implementation of regional offices includes any other office collocated with the regional office.
- FSO/HRO/Minnesota will be a joint effort between National team and Northeastern team; therefore, other offices in Minnesota will be implemented at the same time for efficiency's sake.
- AIP recommended inclusion of DC as a part of the Northeastern team efforts, however, DC customers are tightly linked with Riverdale, so DC has become a part of the National team efforts.

Implementing Through Teamwork

To accomplish this agencywide, international initiative by the September 1998 deadline, the Fort Collins group created seven teams. Five of the groups are described by their geographic location: Northeastern, Southeastern, Central, Western, and International. The sixth team handles national sites such as headquarters at Riverdale and the Field Servicing Office in Minneapolis. The other team will specifically handle Notes installation on the Unix-based system for PPQ in the Northeastern Region.

Each team is made up of ITc's customer service personnel from the program areas and support staffs in that region or location.

They will be working together at the various sites to install and/or train employees on the new e-mail.

These teams will be supported by people in Technology Resource Management (TRM), a functional area of the ITc. TRM includes the Lotus Notes Engineering Team that led the beta test. Their ongoing role is to keep systems that support the users' computers up to par and support customer service employees to ensure that employees using the e-mail program can send and receive their mail. "The Lotus Notes Engineering Team members serve as experts to the experts and will definitely play a major role in the success of this initiative," said Bowman.

APHIS Integrated Planning Team

The AIP's role during the implementation is to ensure that programs' and support staffs' e-mail needs are met and that resources are delivered appropriately. The AIP is a "barrier buster," as Bowman put it. Sally McCammon, science advisor to the Administrator, made it clear at the Fort Collins meeting that if the implementation teams let the AIP and her know about obstacles, help will be forthcoming.

So the Fort Collins group could plan the specifics of implementation, the AIP determined priorities for each team, by State or major location. (See table on opposite page for list of State and location priorities for each team.) Within each State or other location, the teams have the flexibility to set the priorities and schedules. "The best people to plan the details of and play a prominent role in the e-mail implementation at various APHIS sites are those of you in the IT community who are closest to the customer," said CIO Mike Gregoire in a memo to the ITc.

Strategies for Success

One stipulation for setting these priorities and scheduling is that all the programs and staffs in a State will be set up with Notes before a team considers the State completed. "We are not going to have isolated pockets of successes," said Chuck Campbell.

Part of the success of implementation is training. The AIP and implementation teams recognize the need for training to be timely in order to meet customers' needs. While the implementation teams plan their installations and preinstallation interviews, they also schedule the training for users. In some cases, the people installing the package will perform the training. In other cases, program personnel or outside vendors will

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APHIS Integrated Planning (AIP) Team

is a collaborative group of senior APHIS line and support program managers commissioned by the APHIS Management Team (AMT) to plan and guide information technology operations.

Chuck Bare	PPQ/HQ	Riverdale, MD
Jo Brown	PPD	Riverdale, MD
Bill Clay	WS	Washington, DC
Patricia Douglass	PPQ/NE	Moorestown, NY
Craig Fedchock	IS	Washington, DC
Alfred Garcia	PPQ/Central	Brownsville, TX
Vic Harabin	PPQ/SE	Raleigh, NC
Steve Karli	VS	Ames, IA
Sally McCammon	OA	Washington, DC
Rick McNaney	LPA	Riverdale, MD
John Neesen	M&B	Riverdale, MD
Van Pichler	OPD	Frederick, MD
Diana Rangel	WS	Lakewood, CO
Dave Talpas	PPQ/Western	Sacramento, CA
Dick Watkins	AC	Riverdale, MD
Steve Weber	VS	Fort Collins, CO

conduct training. "We are going to use just-in-time training so there isn't a long time between the installation and the training," said Campbell.

"Training at the time of implementation is critical and just as important as customer support after we walk away," said AIP member Steve Weber, Acting Leader of VS' Center for Epidemiology and Animal Health (CEAH) in Fort Collins. The teams determined that customers will need two-level support after installation. ITc customer service personnel will serve as front-line implementers and support to the users. TRM and the Applications and Information Management functional area of ITc will provide technical support to customer service employees.

It's All for the Customer

Teams are planning not only for followup support of the new e-mail and platform, but also for the impact on their normal service to customers during implementation. "That's one of the reasons we are having two subteams working in our region," said Larry Larrivy of the Northeastern Region team, "so someone is always back at the office." There will be some impact on service, but the AIP agreed that it was necessary to get the implementation completed.

This focus on and consideration for the customers was stressed by both the AIP and the ITc. "We provide support for programs," said John Harris, part of ITc at CEAH. "We don't drive their needs. They drive ours."

"Make sure you know your customers' business needs, and remember that they also have customers to support," said AIP member Diana Rangel of WS, Lakewood, CO. "It's not just that you meet your deadline and get out of the way, but that you meet your customers' needs."

Showing further consideration for customers, early this summer, Medley created the *IT Customer Council* to evaluate and provide

feedback to the ITc about customer service issues. The IT Customer Council has met three times, and members are still determining their role in the e-mail implementation.

Cooking Up the Plans

To ensure that they take all these factors into consideration, the teams developed a cookbook for their implementation plans. Chapters in the cookbook cover site preparation, preinstallation, installation, postinstallation support, and an addendum of various issues that may arise. Each chapter is made up of recipes, or specific instructions, of procedures, issues, and steps that need to be followed, addressed, or completed before moving on to the next stage. "We can't just go in and turn a user's workplace upside-down. We need to know the impact and plan for it," said Campbell. The recipes give teams the specific plans they need to conduct a smooth implementation.

The teams ironed out their implementation schedules this fall following the Fort Collins meeting. Exact dates will depend upon delivery of equipment, scheduling among team members and sites, and other issues out of their control.

The AIP is also tackling some of these issues. During the 4-day meeting in Fort Collins and on into October, the AIP has worked on procurement issues and any necessary waivers from the Department. Realization of the need for standard policy on information technology issues throughout the agency, such as purchasing software, was one result of the meeting. Members of the AIP took this with them as one of their first issues to tackle. "Having a standard e-mail package in place could have helped with a lot of these issues," said Steve Weber. "I look forward to where we'll be next year and seeing how this has helped the agency."

The Goal Is Everyone

One of the first places this implementation will impact the agency is with remote users. Due to the priority of getting employees who have no e-mail access on line as soon as possible, a special team has started implementation for remote users, such as those in AC and IES.

Whether the users are remote or at headquarters or on program or support staffs, the goal of everyone working on one e-mail system is not only to get the program up and running by September 30, 1998, but to better help the programs accomplish their missions and achieve the APHIS vision.

"The standard e-mail roll-out is unprecedented in my 19 years with APHIS as it is an agencywide, international initiative," said AIP member Patty Douglass, PPQ State Plant Health Director for Connecticut and Rhode Island. "It truly embodies the spirit of One APHIS and carries out the agency vision to be able to communicate universally on one platform." ❦

Glossary of Technical Terms and Products

APHIS Integrated Planning (AIP) Team: a collaborative group of senior APHIS line and support program managers from diverse geographic locations commissioned by the APHIS Management Team (AMT) to represent each of the units and to plan and guide information technology operations for the agency as a whole.

Applixmail: a *graphical user interface* electronic mail software package that runs on the *Unix* operating system platform.

Beta test: the testing of a computer program (software) or systems before it is implemented on a large scale. It helps to identify problems that may arise during and after implementation and to ensure that the program or system meets expectations and requirements.

Desktop: short for "desktop computer," the computer system at an employee's workstation that may function independently (such as a *personal computer)* or may also be connected to a network (such as a *LAN).*

FTS2000Mail: an electronic mail system used on various computers and networks that displays only text.

Graphical user interface (GUI–pronounced "gooey"): a method to display information to the user though words, pictures, and graphic elements such as windows and icons.

GroupWise 4.1: the office package used on *personal computers* with Windows or Windows 95 mainly to send electronic mail messages. It employs a *graphical user interface.*

Information Technology community (ITc): the group of employees, formerly known as the Information Technology Staff (ITS), who work in APHIS programs and support staffs to provide computer and related support. They are led by the Information Technology Coordination Staff (ITCS), which is overseen by the Chief Information Officer (CIO). Functional areas of the ITc include Technology Resources Management (TRM), Applications and Information Management (AIM), Customer Service (CS), Forecasting and Planning Service (FPS), and the Project Leadership Team.

IT Customer Council: a collaborative group of APHIS employees recently formed to provide

feedback to the *ITc* on its customer-service-related issues throughout the agency.

Integrated Systems Acquisition Project (ISAP) Contract: the contract awarded by APHIS to IBM Government Systems for our purchases of computer equipment, programs, and other resources. The contract is mandatory, meaning that any item or functionally equivalent item must be purchased through the contract (e.g., if the wordprocessing software on the contract has the features you require, you must purchase through the contract). The ISAP contract is a multiyear, annually renewable contract and was signed in September 1995. The first 5 years are mandatory.

Local area network (LAN): a group of interconnected computers serviced by at least one *server,* allowing shared computer resources.

Lotus Notes: the computer program manufactured by IBM that can be purchased through the ISAP contract and best meets APHIS' electronic mail communication needs.

Personal computer (PC): a self-sufficient computer previous known as an "IBM clone" that may or may not be connected to another network. This is the most widely used type of computer in recent years.

Random access memory (RAM): the part of computer memory that is quickly and easily accessed and used for programs that are running. More complex programs require more RAM, and more RAM helps the computer to respond more quickly.

Server: A computer specially equipped to help other computers communicate with one another and allow shared resources, such as on a network.

Standard computing platform: the required equipment (hardware) and programs (software) that the agency will provide each employee to use, which will be connected through compatible systems, allowing information to flow smoothly from one employee to another.

Unix operating system: a type of operating system run on a wide variety of computers, used to provide specific application needs such as electronic mail, scientific computing, and communications services.

FIRST CLASS